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SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE
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Out of Reach

THAT THE CIA HAS sufficient influence with the Justice Department to obtain protection for one of its Mexican intelligence sources who is in danger of being indicted in the U. S. District Court in San Diego for car theft does not surprise us. We have heard and read enough about intelligence-gathering to know that the code of the CIAs and MI5s in this world is to cover the chaps who work from them against exposure which would impair their future usefulness.

Apparently the former chief of Mexico's Directorate of Federal Security, Miguel Nassar Haro, has enjoyed this kind of cover from the CIA for some years in exchange for his supplying the agency with information about the movements of Central American guerrilla leaders. According to intelligence authorities in Mexico who were interviewed by the New York Times, Nassar has been telling his CIA contacts lots of things they're glad to hear about Soviet and Cuban assistance to these guerrilla forces.

NASSAR HAS DISAPPEARED and no one seems to know where he is at the moment. He is no longer chief of the Mexican security agency, however, and in fact since last summer the federal court and grand jury in San Diego have had him under suspicion of involvement in a group of 28 Mexican nationals charged with stealing cars. Fourteen of the 28 have been indicted and convicted for complicity in stealing 600 automobiles in Southern California and transporting them to Mexico to be sold for more than \$8 million at inflated prices.

The U. S. Attorney in San Diego, William H. Kennedy, wants to find and indict Nassar and is upset about the CIA's blocking him in his efforts. We don't blame him. While the CIA may ordinarily be able to make a persuasive case for protecting agents from identification and exposure to risk, the situation becomes less persuasive and indeed rather complex when the operative is engaged in running a car theft ring of grand dimensions.

U. S. Attorney Kennedy went to the San Diego Union with his story about the coverup. He demanded an opportunity to proceed with Nassar's prosecution. Far from backing their San Diego officer, the Justice Department's top echelon has talked angrily of dismissing him. There can be no justification for this kind of threat. A U. S. Attorney doing his duty certainly deserves as much protection as a foreign crook.